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The Thursday Beat | The Thursday Beat | The Thursday Beat

The Clash delivers a rock masterpiece

By JUAN RODRIGUEZ of The Gazette

ALBUM of the week

For two years now, proponents of the punk and new wave movements have been touting The Clash as the best band to come out of Britain during the 1970s. While the quartet's first two albums were impressive, there was no indication that the Clash could come up with a masterpiece such as **London Calling** (Epic). Not only is this two-record set the first really important disc of the new decade — fully worthy of the hype on the plastic wrapping. "The only band that matters" — but it is one of the greatest albums to ever grace the history of rock 'n' roll.

Two-record sets are usually over-blown, but there are some whose length is predicated upon the inspiration of the moment. Bob Dylan's *Blonde on Blonde* and Eric Clapton's *Layla* are two that come to mind, and *London Calling* is the first great double album since the latter's 10 years ago. It's enough to give a jaded old rock critic renewed faith in the power of rock 'n' roll.

The Clash differs from other new-wavers on two counts. This group offers the most trenchant political and social comment in rock today. It also has a superb understanding of the dynamics of basic rock 'n' roll. Listening to *London Calling* is like digesting Marx, Trotsky, Buddy Holly and the Beatles in one gulp — an extremely potent brew.

While the Elvis Costellos of this world spew nihilism, The Clash spurs on its audience to an understanding of social conditions and the need for change. Working for the Clampdown, *The Guns of Brixton* and the reggae-influenced *Revolution Rock* are all as menacing as the titles suggest. However, the Clash expresses social disaffection with a poetic touch.

Here's the first verse of *Death or Glory*: "Every cheap hood strikes a bargain with the world, And ends up making payments on a sofa or a girl. Love 'n' hate tattooed across the knuckles of his hands. The hands that slap his kids around 'cos they don't understand ... How death or glory becomes just another story ..."

There's a stinging indictment of the advertising world and its penchant for cocaine ("Koke adds life, where there isn't any") and a sensitive parallel between consumerism and alienation in *Lost in the Supermarket*.

There are no ballads on *London Calling*, and the closest that comes to a love song is a chilling portrait of the late tormented actor Montgomery Clift and a nameless song that ends the record and demands "Stand by me or not at all." Not one of the 19 songs is weak.

The production by Guy Stevens is crisp and basic. The Clash's beautiful musical nuances — yes, this is a punk-oriented band that does not just offer recycled Rolling Stones riffs — are straight on the surface. Whereas various "power-pop" acts can only trivialize the rock 'n' roll vocabulary that's been formulated over 25 years, The Clash gives these familiar riffs and looks new meaning and urgency.

Oh yes — you can also dance to *London Calling*.

'7ieme' showcases Sanson's fresh style

SPINOFF

Are you tired of plunking down $7 or $8 of your hard-earned money for an album that turns out to be a stiff? Maybe this guide can help. These are some of the best — and worst — LPs *The Gazette* has reviewed in recent weeks:

7ieme — Veronique Sanson (Elektra). Using the largest rhythm, string and horn sections of her career, the French chanteuse delivers a fine display of her considerable musical talents. Her style comes as a breath of fresh air.

The Pleasure Principle — Gary Numan (Beggar's Banquet-WEA). Weird, hypnotic repetitive synthesizer music that will reach listeners on a visceral level. Dull at first listen, Numan's second LP grows on you.

Bolero — *Tomita* (RCA). Japanese synthesizer whiz strives to portray music as if it were being played by human beings. In his treatment of Ravel's classic, Tomita succeeds.

Angel of the Night — Angela Bofill (Arista). There are flaws — notably simplistic lyrics — but the second album from this New York Hispanic jazz singer offers a refreshing blend of pop and jazz. Tasteful arrangements and production, plus a cookin' band, provide an apt setting for Bofill's vocal magic.

Sidewalks, Fences and Walls — *Solomon Burke* (Infinity). An erstwhile great soul singer attempts disco with little feeling or enthusiasm and the result is a pale imitation of Barry White.

Back on the Right Track — *Sly and the Family Stone* (Warner Bros.). Another unpleasant comeback record by a group that's been his sputtering efforts of the 70s. The music here lacks toughness and edge; there is nothing to remind listeners of the halcyon days of the band.

Midnight Music — *Martin Stephens* (CBS). The local disco scene is rumored to be one of the most vibrant on the continent, but Stephens — seeking a breakout with this debut album — has come up with a miserable flop. Juvenile, if not plain dull.

Comin' at Ya — *The Persuasions* (Flying Fish). A group that has toned in obscurity since they first appeared on the folk circuit in Brooklyn a decade ago, the Persuasions are unique purveyors of a capella soul. The latest LP is a treat for ears that have been electrified and synthesized to death. The only sounds here are those of the human voice ... and what sounds!

Diamonds for the Kid — *Walter Rossi* (Aquarius). The local wringtight guitar stylist delivers working man's wisdom, the result of 400 hours in the studio. A pair of long, over-produced cuts mar an otherwise fine effort.

September Morn — *Neil Diamond* (Columbia). Never has more of the same sounded more palatable. Diamond maintains his reputation without overreaching or sounding phoney.

The Other One — *Bob Welch* (Capitol). Ten sweet-swinging songs by a guitarist who quit Fleetwood Mac before the band hit it big. Welch's first solo album, which emerges as a star in his own right.

Broken English — *Marianne Faithfull* (Island). Back from drug addiction and obscurity, Mick Jagger's ex-flame and ex-fling Marianne Faithfull growls, smarts and spits out bleak images against a hard-driving rock band — hardly *As Tears Go By*, but fascinating listening.

I Remember Charlie Parker — Joe Pass (Pablo). Interpretations based on Parker's recordings with strings. Playing acoustic guitar, Pass creates a beautifully haunting mood, both an echo of the past and a reminder of how vibrant the music remains.

Live Rust — *Neil Young and Crazy Horse* (Warner Bros). Neil Young enters the 80s under a full head of steam. Four sides of hard-driving rock 'n' roll — recorded in concert — offer an aural history of where Young has been and an exciting indication of where he is going.

No Nukes — *Musicians United for Safe Energy* (Asylum). Recorded at last September's both anti-nuclear benefit concerts at Madison Square Garden, the three-record set includes a booklet devoted to the dangers of nuclear energy. The splat comes across as too earnest but the music is a clear winner. A star-studded cast including Jackson Browne, Bonnie Raitt, James Taylor Carly Simon, the Doobie Brothers, Jackson Browne and Bruce Springsteen performing his rousing Mitch Ryder medley.

Allons Danser — *Zachary Richard* (CBS). The latest fare of Quebecois music fans is actually a Louisianan, but why quibble over details? Richard's latest is chock full of rhythmic diversity, incorporating salsa, reggae, calypso and exuberant, rocking interpretations of traditional Cajun two-steps. The combination produces an infectious sound that is sure to set your toes to tapping.

Live from New York — *Gilda Radner* (Warner Bros.). This album, based on Radner's broadway show, is not a great comedy record but it sure to be a hit with *Saturday Night Live*'s devotees who will snap up any product from their heroes. The high point is Rhonda Weiss and the Rhondettes singing a protest song about the burning of saccharine.

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